

★ **Northern Light: Power, Land, and the Memory of Water****Kazim Ali**

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Kazim Ali's eloquent memoir *Northern Light* reports on the complicated history of a Canadian landscape and its Pimicikamak residents, who endure human-made challenges every day.

Ali grew up in Jenpeg, Manitoba, a temporary town that was built to house those who constructed its hydroelectric dam. This book began as a nostalgic inquiry into that place, but grew into an exploration of human connections to land and water, personal and cultural identities, and the meaning of home. Ali learned what he could about his "real hometown," where he "came into language," and where his inner poet was born.

In nearby Cross Lake, Ali discovered, an Indigenous community faced problems because of environmental degradation, the trauma of colonization, and a horrifying epidemic of child suicides. Ali, invited by Chief Cathy Merrick to visit the area, spent a week meeting with its residents. Those experiences are relayed in sensitive, crystalline prose, documenting how Cross Lake residents are working to reinvent their town and rebuild their traditional beliefs, language, and relationships with the natural world.

Illuminating contrasts are drawn between Ali's Indian/Pakistani Muslim background and Native culture; Ali analyzes differences between Canadian and Indigenous identity, and their diametrically opposed perspectives about land and resource ownership. Intracommunity tensions are acknowledged in relation to religion, gender roles, alcohol sales, and relationships between Pimicikamak residents on provincial and reservation lands and the government. Though these topics are complex, they are untangled in an elegant manner.

Lyrical motifs of stargazing, and of an origami crane that Ali carries as a talisman during his visit, enrich the book's descriptive passages. Throughout *Northern Light*, Ali continues to reassess his understandings of his childhood memories and his reasons for returning to Jenpeg. The book's open-ended questions, like "What does it mean to be from?," are resonant.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (January / February 2021)

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